

Living the Legacy Labor Module Outline

8 lessons, plus biographical sketches

Draft as of 1/19/12

Enduring Understandings for the Labor Module:

- Jews have shaped the American Labor Movement from all sides
- Work/labor has shaped the American Jewish experience
- The labor movement is not only a story of unions and strikes but also of daily economic relations, policies, and choices
- Collective action has, and continues to be, a key part of Jewish people's understanding of social justice

Essential Questions for the Labor Module:

- How does our understanding of the past influence how we choose to live our lives?
- What role do work, the economy, and social justice play in our daily lives and choices?
- What does Jewish tradition teach about the ethics of work and labor relations?
- What is the relationship of American Jews to labor and the labor movement today?

Lesson 1: Bread and Roses—Defining Basic Needs

Enduring Understandings:

- Basic human needs include those of the body as well as the soul.

Essential Questions:

- What can't human beings live without?
- How do social and cultural activities nurture our humanity?
- How do human needs vary from individual to individual?

This lesson covers the concept of Bread and Roses, the needs identified by workers, and explores specific cases on education & culture, clothing, poetry & song, and traditional Jewish sources on labor.

Lesson 2: From Suffering to Action, From the Individual to the Collective

Enduring Understandings:

- Articulating the circumstances of one's own suffering is a first step in taking power to change those circumstances.
- Creating change is a social process done in community with others.
- There are many different models for creating social change. (e.g. collective action, legislation)

Essential Questions:

- What are various ways in which people respond to suffering and inequality?
- When does suffering/injustice become a catalyst for change?

- Why were Jewish women in particular involved in organizing the garment industry?
- What was the role of young women in organizing the garment industry?

This lesson covers sweatshops and work conditions, the Uprising of the 20,000 in 1909-1910, and the Triangle fire and its aftermath.

Lesson 3: Identity, Independence, and Becoming American Jews

Enduring Understandings:

- Working in the garment industry, Jewish immigrant women encountered American culture and began to forge American Jewish identities.
- Even demeaning, low paying, dangerous and deadening work can be liberating in some way.
- By working outside the home with other young women, immigrant women in the garment industry cultivated peer group identities that connected them to the broader American culture and helped them differentiate from their families.

Essential Questions:

- In what ways do you identify as “American”? How does that identity intersect with the other ways in which you identify, for example, being Jewish, a member of a particular socio-economic class, a person who is urban/suburban/rural, being an athlete/band member/dancer, etc?
- How can work be liberating? How can being a part of group be meaningful?
- How do you and your friends define your place in American society?

This lesson explores inter-generational relationships among Jewish immigrants, and the role of work and workers’ youth culture in the Americanization process.

Lesson 4: From Self Help to Global Justice

Enduring Understandings:

- When we succeed in helping ourselves out of oppressive conditions, we are often motivated to work in solidarity with others.
- Methods for pursuing social justice continue to expand as Jews’ identification with other groups diversifies.

Essential Questions:

- With whom do you feel solidarity?
- To whom would you turn for help?
- What were different models for affiliation in the American Jewish immigrant community and what purposes did they serve?

This lesson will explore the concept and value of mutual aid, as well as the history of landsmanshaften, unions, and settlement houses, and the shift in Jewish labor activism from activism rooted in their own experience to activism rooted in a sense of solidarity

with others based in the Jewish historical experience. (Includes project on current social change organizations.)

Lesson 5: Housewives and Consumer Organizing—Labor Tools in Different Contexts

Enduring Understandings

- We are all influenced by and have the power to affect the economy.
- Women brought the tools of labor activism into the domestic realm.

Essential Questions:

- How did the skills and goals that were necessary and desired in the labor movement transfer to other aspects of life?
- How did Jewish women teach others about the power of the consumer to effect economic change?

This lesson will cover examples of consumer organizing including the kosher meat boycotts in the early 20th century.

Lesson 6: Agriculture and Jewish Farming

Enduring Understandings

- Jewish labor didn't only happen in factories and urban environments
- Jewish tradition is rich with values around food and agriculture
- Jewish values about the holiness of growing food lose or gain prominence depending on economic realities.

Essential Questions

- What Jewish values influence choices about growing and buying food?
- How do economic conditions influence choices about growing food?
- What precedents exist for the contemporary Jewish return to the land movement?
- How are Jewish values applied to food production and consumption, historically and today?
- What is/has been the role of agricultural labor to the American Jewish community?

This lesson will cover farming ventures in the first half of the 20th century and in recent decades, including the resurgent Jewish interest in food justice.

Lesson 7: Immigration Debates: Then and Now

Enduring Understandings

- American society in the early 20th century and today depends on immigrants to do work that is unappealing and undervalued.
- Immigrants have frequently been depicted in negative ways to justify regulating immigration.
- Negative stereotypes of immigrants transcend historic periods.

Essential Questions

- How does America benefit from a steady stream of immigrants?
- How do American citizens on the one hand support, and on the other, persecute, immigrants?
- What kinds of arguments have prevailed over time to exclude immigrants from full acceptance in the U.S?

This lesson will explore parallels between the immigration debates of the early 20th century and today, drawing on political cartoons and other primary sources.

Lesson 8: Contemporary Jewish Labor Campaigns: Living wage teshuva and domestic workers

Enduring Understandings:

- Mechanisms for protecting the rights of laborers found in the Classical Jewish tradition continue to serve us in the contemporary Jewish world.
- Methods of social change used by the early labor movement remain effective today.

Essential Questions:

- What does Jewish tradition teach about fair and unfair working conditions and why we should everyone be concerned with them, regardless of whether or not they experience harsh working conditions themselves?
- In what ways do unfair labor practices violate basic human rights, and what methods are currently being used to abolish them?

This lesson focuses on contemporary labor issues and why and how Jewish organizations are working to help oppressed workers who aren't Jewish. Students will use classical Jewish resources, as well as secondary sources including pieces from Rabbi Jill Jacobs' Living Wage teshuva, and the Shalom Bayit Domestic Workers campaign of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ).

Biographical sketches will include:

Bessie Abramowitz Hillman
David Dubinsky
Sandra Feldman
Samuel Gompers
Sophie Gerson
Sidney Hillman
Clara Lemlich
Sophie Maslow
Pauline Newman
Rose Pesotta
Matilda Robbins
Rose Schneiderman